SENSE OF THE FACULTY MOTION - ON MEETING THE MOMENT

Sponsored by the AAUP Executive Committee

Motion:

We, the Middlebury Faculty, commend our trustees and administrators for their explicit support of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression; for signing the *Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration* amicus curiae brief in *AAUP v. Rubio*; for endorsing *A Call for Constructive Engagement* by the American Association of Colleges and Universities; and for signing onto *Community Letter Reaffirming the Independence of Higher Education Governance* by Association of Governing Boards.

We, the Middlebury Faculty, urge our trustees and administrators to consider additional, concrete steps, including:

Committing to provide all necessary resources—including additional draws from the endowment—to protect Academic Freedom, Freedom of Expression, and our community values by all available means.

Ensuring access to effective legal counsel for members of our community targeted for transmitting knowledge on their academic fields in exercise of said freedoms, as well as for members of our community targeted for constitutionally protected political speech on campus.

Being prepared to legally challenge any unlawful federal demands, including the termination of grants not in accordance with approved contracts and any federal attempts to interfere with curricular or administrative autonomy.

Defending all academic disciplines, and supporting scholars whose fields may be mischaracterized as political speech or be deemed objectionable for accreditation under recent Executive Orders by the federal administration.

Recommitting to Middlebury's Privacy Policy and expanding its scope to include anti-doxxing and privacy support for students, staff, and faculty—especially those at risk due to their political or academic work. The College should adopt minimum-necessary standards in policies that govern personal information and may expose academic or expressive activity.

Retaining immigration legal counsel to protect international scholars—faculty, staff, and students—who may face arbitrary visa termination, detention, or deportation.

Expanding our commitment to a diverse and inclusive community, including non-citizens, undocumented and under-documented individuals, and trans/gender-nonconforming students, staff, and faculty, in the form of access to legal services, summer housing, employment assistance, and financial stipends.

Rejecting federal pressure to adopt policies or definitions—in areas such as antisemitism or gender—that may be used in ways incompatible with academic freedom, or to violate the rights to free expression and assembly, putting members of our community in danger.

Pursuing alliances with peer institutions to commit substantial funding and shared resources to address these concerns collaboratively, and to mount a collective defense against potential punitive actions by the federal government.

Working collaboratively with faculty, students and staff, to strengthen our strategic response to the issues outlined above—as well as those sure to arise in the ongoing attack on higher education.

Establishing a media strategy that clearly and publicly articulates our principled positions, affirming the value of higher education and Middlebury's contributions to it.

Rationale:

We are living an extraordinarily perilous moment; the democratic backslide is underway and the constitutional crisis is here.

The Trump administration and its allies are illegally imprisoning people in inhumane facilities, domestic and abroad, without due process; exiling American citizens including children and infants; directing its Department of Justice to prosecute perceived political enemies; using the FBI to publicly perp-walk federal judges; attacking transgender inclusion in the military and sports; firing women and Black people from top military positions. The list goes on and expands every day.

The Trump administration and its allies are reshaping the federal government to dismantle barriers to an authoritarian regime. They are in the process of eliminating the Department of Education; they are defunding the Sciences, the Arts and Humanities, Museums, Libraries and Cultural institutions; they are erasing the government's institutional memory of civil rights and inclusion, erasing contributions made by women, Black, indigenous, and LGBTQ+ individuals; they are illegally mining our private data to crack down on migrant communities. In all, they are setting the basis for authoritarian control; they are increasingly defiant of the Judiciary, and intimidate state and federal legislatures into compliance and powerlessness. The list goes on and expands every day.

The Trump administration and its allies are at war with civil society and independent institutions—legal firms, the free press, higher education, and even states—that they view as potential threats to their consolidation of power. They are using executive authority to pressure these institutions into compliance. The recent developments at Columbia University serve as a stark illustration. Under federal pressure, Columbia instituted changes to its admissions, diversity, disciplinary, and safety policies— without

faculty consultation. In doing so, the university has damaged its academic integrity, compromised its principles, and fractured its community. Despite their compliance, Columbia's federal funding has not been officially reinstated.

The strategy of using progressive language—such as "fighting antisemitism" or "defending academic freedom"—to undermine higher education predates the Trump administration. The takeover of New College of Florida under Governor Ron DeSantis can be seen as a pilot project for this broader agenda. It demonstrates how vague invocations of "academic freedom" can be twisted into tools of repression. Years of populist attacks on higher education have laid the groundwork, fostering anti-intellectual sentiment among the public. And too often, universities have responded with silence—clinging to a misguided notion of institutional neutrality.

There have been exceptions. Under pressure from the federal administration, Harvard —advised by their own faculty expert in failing democracies—has decided to fight back in the courts. Wesleyan's president Michael Roth has engaged in a public defense of higher education calling for collective action and moral courage. Mount Holyoke's president Danielle Holley has publicly defended the value of diversity, equity and inclusion programs in our colleges and universities.

This is a time of exception—one that demands an exceptional response. A time to speak up in defense of the principles at the core of higher education. Only in freedom the production of knowledge can thrive. Only in the unfettered respect for human rights and the rule of law can colleges and universities fulfill their educational and research programs. At this critical juncture, Middlebury must recommit not only to the principles of academic freedom, freedom of expression and shared governance, but to a clear articulation of what those principles mean in 2025—and what we are prepared to do to uphold them.

HYPERLINKS/RESOURCES

- Amicus Curiae brief on AAUP v Rubio by The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration.
- A Call for Constructive Engagement by the American Association of Colleges and Universities.
- *Trump's Deportees to El Salvador Are Now "Ghosts" in U.S. Courts*. By Jonathan Blitzer for The New Yorker.
- *The Destruction of the Department of Justice*, by Paul Rosenzweig for The Atlantic.
- *Trump has made more than 100 threats to prosecute or punish perceived enemies*. On NPR'S All Things Considered.
- *FBI arrests judge accused of helping man evade immigration agents, agency director Patel says.* AP/PBS

- *Trump asks Supreme Court to allow ban on transgender service members from the military.* By Amy Howe for Scotus Blog.
- *DOD leadership firings spark concerns over support for female officers*. By Jerry Wu for Military Times.
- *Arts agency terminates dozens of grants after Trump proposes eliminating NEA.* The Guardian.
- *Trump Ordered the Education Department to Be 'Shut Down.'* By Lauren Camera, Aneeta Mathur-Ashton and Laura Mannweiler for USNEWS.
- *Trump signs executive order to 'eliminate' agency that funds museums and libraries.* By Benjamin Sutton for The Art Newspaper.
- *Here are all the ways people are disappearing from government websites.* By Huo Jingnan and Quil Lawrence for NPR
- *Pentagon history purge highlights which stories are told and why others are ignored*. By Geoff Benett and Ian Couzens for PBS.
- *DOGE is collecting federal data to remove immigrants from housing, jobs.* By Rachel Siegel, Hannah Natanson and Laura Meckle for The Washington Post.
- IRS reaches data-sharing deal with DHS to help find undocumented immigrants for deportation. By Marshall Cohen and Rene Marsh for CNN.
- *Trump says he's unsure whether people in the US are entitled to due process.* By John Kruzel for Reuters.
- *America's long history of 'checks and balances' is being tested by Trump like rarely before.* By Bill Barrow for AP.
- *Trump vs. the eggheads. The president is waging war on America's knowledge workers.* By Emily Stewart for *Business Insider*.
- *Columbia to acquiesce to Trump administration's demands amid federal funding threats.* By Spencer Davis, Joseph Zuloaga, Emily Pickering, and August Phillips for The Columbia Spectator.
- *Higher education under attack*. By Randi Weingarten. President of the AFT.
- *A University President Makes a Case Against Cowardice*. Q&A with Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan. By Molly Fischer for The Atlantic.
- *'We must not be neutral': Wesleyan president slams Trump as 'threat to higher ed'.* By Gabrielle Temaat for The College Fix.
- *Colleges Around the US Cautiously Navigate Trump's DEI Crackdown.* AP/USNEWS.